



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

*A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living*

Breaking Open the Word  
Mary Birmingham

## 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time | Year B

A COMMENTARY BY PHILLIP MEDHURST ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK



H1. BOWYER BIBLE PRINT 4911. THE BARREN FIG TREE. FRENCH SCHOOL.



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

(Found in your parish Sacramentary.)

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

### ***Prayer for Generosity***

***St. Ignatius of Loyola***

*Eternal Word,*

*only begotten Son of God,*

*Teach me true generosity.*

*Teach me to serve you as you deserve.*

*To give without counting the cost,*

*To fight heedless of wounds,*

*To labor without seeking rest,*

*To sacrifice myself without thought of any reward*

*Save the knowledge that I have done your will.*

*Amen.*

Catholic  
**Faith, Life  
& Creed**  
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Word worksheets  
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Doctrinal Sessions.

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## Liturgical Context

The end of the liturgical year is fast approaching. With the end in sight our attention focuses on the culmination of Jesus' ministry.

- ▶ Today Jesus presents prepares his disciples for the end of the age and the establishment of his kingdom.
- ▶ His mission is culminating and we stand on the precipice of the drama unfolding before us—his Lordship and universal Kingship is about to be established by the sacrifice of the Cross.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?

## First Reading: Daniel 12: 1-3

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ **The prophet Daniel reveals belief in resurrection from the dead for the first time in Scripture.**
- ▶ Today's reading is a perfect companion to today's Gospel.
- ▶ The text reflects the prophet's proclamation of the end of the cosmic age.
- ▶ God will deliver his people; they will be resurrected.
- ▶ This text is the earliest recording of belief in the resurrection of the dead in the Old Testament.
- ▶ The righteous will be separated from the unjust. The former will enjoy eternal life with God and the evil ones will experience eternal shame.
- ▶ Resurrection implies conversion of heart, metanoia, a radical change. Those who experienced resurrected life will shine like heavenly stars.
- ▶ Jesus claims that those who experience resurrection will resemble the angels of heaven.
- ▶ We learn from the apostle Paul that we will assume a new, heavenly body.
- ▶ Resurrected life is not bound to place or locale. It is not life in another place. It is complete and total transformation—a state of being.
- ▶ Resurrected life is life different from life experienced on an earthly plane.
- ▶ Resurrected life is transcendent life—life lived in the wings of unbridled joy--a new, transcendent form of existence.
- ▶ The prophet's intention was to challenge and encourage the people to remain faithful in the face of spreading Hellenism and during a time of severe persecution by Antiochus Epiphanies.
- ▶ The people were exhorted to remain faithful to Judaism as this new religion was being forced upon them.
- ▶ God would uphold and rescue his faithful ones.
- ▶ Daniel's message is a universal message to nations of all generations that God is sovereign and will use the dominion and fall of empires as an opportunity to establish his kingdom of peace and justice.

- ▶ Daniel is also the first prophet to mention the angel Michael whose name means “who is like God”. Michael enters the conquest against evil. He will stand strong in the face of an excruciatingly difficult opponent.
- ▶ Humanity’s righteous deeds will be recorded in a book.
- ▶ Righteous and unrighteous are subject to death. The righteous, however, will rise again—their death will not be permanent.
- ▶ The righteous will experience the Light of God for all eternity—they will share God’s divine nature.
- ▶ We proclaim that truth in our preface for Christmas—a Divine exchange takes place in the Incarnation of God’s Son—all creation is made holy and human beings are given a share of Christ’s own divinity.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News for us today in this reading?
- ▶ In what way are you able to relate this reading to your own life experience?
- ▶ What is the Good News in Daniel’s reading for you and for your community?
- ▶ Why does your community need to hear this word at this time?
- ▶ In what way do you need to be encouraged and exhorted to more committed discipleship?
- ▶ Who, in your opinion, are the righteous of today and who would fall into the category of unrighteous? (Catechist: Keep in mind that St. James tells us that discernible evidence of righteousness is observed in the way we care for widows and orphans and conversion of heart.)
- ▶ How do you understand resurrection? Do you believe in resurrection from the dead? What obstacle stands in the way of your belief?

## Second Reading: Hebrews 10: 11-14, 18

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ The author compares Jesus’ priesthood with the ordinary priesthood of Judaism.
- ▶ The author of Hebrews proclaims that Jesus’ sacrifice renders all Judaism’s sacrifice obsolete. The author of Hebrews compares Jesus’ sacrifice with the sacrifices offered by the ordinary priests of Israel.
  - Various types of sacrifice existed:
- ▶ Holocaust—a holocaust offering was the complete burning of the sacrifice on an altar offered daily in atonement for sin.

- ▶ Cereal offering –the cereal offering was made with grain and cereal and with oil and incense. Part of this sacrifice was burned and part was eaten by priest and family.
- ▶ Peace Offering—the peace offering was offered in hopes of establishing a harmonious relationship with God. There were three types of this offering--an animal was offered in *thanksgiving* to God; *votive* sacrifice offered as response to a vow; *free will* offering was offered simply as a gift to God.
- ▶ Sin Offering--a *sin offering* was presented as atonement for sin--an ethical or physical uncleanness. Any person who came into contact with anything unclean, if he or she sinned or had a disease of any kind he or she was required to make this offering. The fat of an animal was burned and its blood was sprinkled on the altar. The rest of the offering was burned outside the temple. Poor people were allowed to sacrifice a dove.
- ▶ Jesus replaced each of those sacrificial offerings. He was the one, holy sacrifice offered in praise to God (Holocaust). As a result of his sacrifice peaceful harmony between God and humanity was achieved (peace offering). Jesus' sacrifice accomplished the forgiveness of sins thus rendering blood sacrifice obsolete (sin and guilt sacrifices). He spilled his blood in atonement for sin.
- ▶ Jesus sits on his throne as High Priest; he returned to his Father's right hand; he ascended to the Father.
- ▶ Jesus' priesthood continues in the community of believers.
- ▶ *Standing* is a reference to the ongoing intercession by the great High Priest, Jesus.
- ▶ *Perfection* is not a reference to moral perfection. It is a reflection of incorporation into Christ's life through participation in his Paschal Mystery—his life, death and resurrection.
- ▶ Believers feast at the Eucharistic banquet here as heaven is wedded to earth in that sacrificial banquet. All feast at the Eucharistic banquet as they await the final banquet in heaven.
- ▶ Jesus sacrifice was one and for all; it can never be repeated.
- ▶ The effects of his sacrifice are eternal, however. He continues to intercede for us until the end of the age.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ In what way, if any, can you relate to the teaching in this reading?
- ▶ In what way do you or have you ever exercised a priestly role by praying for others? Why is this a good thing to do? What were the fruits of your prayers?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that Jesus' sacrifice can never be repeated and that it was once and for all people?
- ▶ How does the priesthood of Jesus speak to your own relationship with him?
- ▶ In what way is Jesus a Priest for you?

## Gospel: Mark 13: 24-32

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

### Gospel Exegesis

For those catechists who prefer an abbreviated interpretation of the Gospel refer to the bulleted points that follow and then choose questions for your reflection found at the end of the entire exegesis. (Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.)



Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

### Abbreviated treatment of the Gospel:

- ▶ Today's Gospel is of the literary type known as a farewell address and an apocalyptic.
- ▶ The Bible is resplendent with such last will and testament discourses from Biblical heroes such as Moses, Joshua, Jesus and Paul.
- ▶ Today's Gospel is a Christian apocalyptic that not only focuses on last things but also on the value of redemptive suffering for the sake of the Gospel.
- ▶ Mark urges watchfulness as the exalted Lord will one day return in glory. Believers are to be prepared.
- ▶ The Son of Man—the divine being espoused in the Book of Daniel and a term Jesus used to refer to himself—will return at the *end of days* (a term borrowed from Jewish ancestry) and gather the elect into his loving embrace.
- ▶ Mark's message is urgent. Disciples beware! Waste no time. The time is short. Christians must make the most of their time and energy.
- ▶ The fig tree served as a reminder.
- ▶ Most of the trees of the area were evergreens. The fig tree however, sprouted buds when winter was over and summer was approaching. Christians would know summer had arrived when the temple was destroyed--such would be the sign that the end was near.
- ▶ The disciples would know Jesus' words to be true by the farming analogy of the fig tree.
- ▶ The fig tree metaphor illustrates Jesus' belief in God's immanent judgment.
- ▶ Jesus compared his words to God's creation. Creation would pass away; creation and nature changes. God's words on the other hand will never pass away; they are eternal and can be trusted.
- ▶ The day and the hour of these cataclysmic events and the fulfillment of salvation history would occur in God's time, not ours.
- ▶ The message is clear: trust the future to God's care.
- ▶ The response of disciples is faith.

This brings the abbreviated interpretation to a close. Refer to the questions at the end of the entire exegesis and choose the appropriate questions for your reflection.

### Further elaboration of the Gospel:

The following exegesis is provided for your further and continued reflection.

- ▶ In addition to the above material there are several other interesting elements in this Gospel for our reflection.
- ▶ Jesus' expression of celestial events in the first verses echo the prophet Isaiah 13:10: "The stars of the heavens and their constellations will send forth no light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not give its light."
- ▶ Such phenomena even though we know them to be meteor showers and eclipses

were unpredictable signs in the heavens at the time of Christ.

- ▶ Ancient people believed that events observed in the night sky were indicators of events to come on earth.
- ▶ Thus it held that such chaotic activity would signal the coming of much disturbance and travail.
- ▶ The *powers in the heavens* (v. 25) referred either to the night sky activity of the stars or the minor spirits that were believed to control the heavens.
- ▶ Jews believed in minor spirits that were of a higher order than humans and were considered evil beings.
- ▶ Heavenly chaos was understood as God's control and shake-up of the evil world of spirits.
- ▶ It held, therefore, that if God were to act against such spirits, human beings could expect a similar fate.
- ▶ Verse 13:26 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' is a phrase from the book of Daniel. The clouds were symbolic of God's presence.
- ▶ Daniel understood the arrival of the Son of Man as a foreshadowing of deliverance of God's faithful remnant people.
- ▶ God delivered the Israelites out of bondage in the desert; God will once again similarly deliver his people.
- ▶ The messengers referred to in this text are angels.
- ▶ The four winds refer to all directions—north, south, east and west—encompassing the entire world.
- ▶ The sky was a phenomenon that led invited all sorts of scientific explanation. Ancient people believed that the sky was an upside down bowl and the earth was a flat plate. At some point both would collide.
- ▶ Thus all people—from the four winds and from the heavens and the earth would all be gathered as one in the Kingdom of God.
- ▶ Mark believed that Christ would return in his generation. This belief is evident in today's Gospel narrative. (13:30)
- ▶ Jesus revealed the advent of this event as the coming of the divine King. Cosmic signs and disturbances were announcements of this awe-filled event.
- ▶ This magnificent King would arrive in glory, on the clouds.
- ▶ The angels (messengers) would gather all the people from the four winds.
- ▶ Jesus alludes to the displacement of the Jewish people due to economic oppression. He implies that the injustice of Jews living in foreign lands would be rectified in his lifetime [30].
- ▶ The fig tree is an image and symbol used throughout Scripture.
- ▶ Scripture considers the fig tree a sign of God's blessing of the land.
- ▶ Moses uses it as a metaphor and sign of the Promised Land.
- ▶ The fig tree is the only tree mentioned in the Garden of Eden. The leaves of the fig tree are what clothed Adam and Eve in their nakedness after the fall.
- ▶ The death of a fig tree is a sign of curse upon the land.
- ▶ Conversely, a flourishing fig tree is a sign of blessing.
- ▶ The prophet Micah refers to the fig tree as a sign of the messianic return to the Davidic monarchy.

- ▶ The Talmud insists that a flourishing fig tree is a sign of a righteous and upright person whereas a dying tree is a sign of evil and wickedness.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to ONE or MORE appropriate questions (as time allows) in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface their insights in the wider group. Catechist responds by sharing his or her own experience. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the Good News in the Gospel?
- ▶ What is the lesson in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does the urgency of this Gospel have to teach you today? Why is this still a relevant principle?
- ▶ How does this Gospel speak to your life at this time in your life?
- ▶ What signs are there in your life that God is waiting to get closer to you?
- ▶ What does the fig tree have to teach you at this time in your life?
- ▶ How do you feel about the fact that even Jesus and the apostles thought God's final judgment was near and yet we are still here? What does that teach us about God? About Jesus? About salvation history?
- ▶ Do you believe God causes cataclysmic events to get our attention? Does God send hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, terrorist attacks?

(Catechist: it is important in this question to remember that God does not cause evil things, but when evil things happen, God is with us in them and uses them to get our attention and to invite conversion of heart.)

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the following question in the group or in their journal.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?



## CONCLUDING PRAYER

*THE PRAYER,  
O LORD MY GOD  
(By Saint Anselm.)*

O Lord my God.  
Teach my heart this day  
where and how to find you.

You have made me and re-made me,  
and you have bestowed on me  
all the good things I possess,  
and still I do not know you.  
I have not yet done  
that for which I was made.

Teach me to seek you,  
for I cannot seek you  
unless you teach me,  
or find you  
unless you show yourself to me.

Let me seek you in my desire;  
let me desire you in my seeking.  
Let me find you by loving you;  
let me love you when I find you.

OR  
Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

## APPENDIX

### ➤ How does this Gospel speak to your life at this time in your life?

Several times in recent history my life was on the brink. I came face to face with my mortality. I was faced with the prospect of saying my final goodbye to family and friends. Needless to say death and dying has been on my mind and a common reflection.

There have been no cataclysmic events to prepare me, but illness itself was my preparation. The gift in illness is to seek God's healing, of course, but also inherent in prolonged illness is the invitation to deep, interior communion with the God who knows us best and loves us most.

The greatest gift of the months of illness leading up to a kidney transplant, the months of recovery afterwards, the near loss of that kidney as well as the near loss of my life a year later led me into a discovery of presence I knew on a cerebral level but was privileged to intimately encounter in the core of my being.

God led me on a journey of communion—he gave me a glimpse of the Light within and the amazing gift of love, acceptance and presence as well as the assurance of that love, acceptance and presence. I was able to honestly tell my family that I loved them and that God's would be with me no matter the outcome. I would either be enveloped into the Beatific Vision or I would remain here to continue the journey toward that Vision.

If the communion I experienced is a glimpse of our promised eternal life, then heaven is indeed a pearl well worth waiting for, treasuring and guarding with our lives and the fig tree is truly a sign of unfathomable blessing.



# Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Daniel 12: 1-3 | Hebrews 10: 11-14, 18 | Mark 13: 24-32

*Eschatology, Heaven, Hell and  
Purgatory.  
Scripture and Revelation I or II  
Stewardship  
Salvation/Soteriology*

*Saints  
Liturgical Year  
Kingdom of God  
Eucharist Series*

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

## ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

These last days of the liturgical year focus on last things, end times and Jesus return. Jesus insists that he will gather the elect from the four winds. Those who live righteous lives can expect to be true citizens in the kingdom of God—here and now and in the hereafter. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL, AND PURGATORY.

## SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II

Mark draws from Old Testament prophetic imagery in his description of the Parousia. Today's Gospel is referred to as an apocalyptic—a literary form in sacred Scripture that looks to the last age and the end of the world. It is thus an opportune time to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II.

## STEWARDSHIP

Jesus insists that he will gather the elect; he will not come in judgment but to bring his children home. Our lives must be in constant preparation for this glorious day. One way to prepare our lives is to be good stewards of the gifts God has given us—to honor God's creation and be good stewards of the resources we have been given. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about STEWARDSHIP.

## **SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY**

Jesus insists that he will gather the elect; he will not come in judgment but to bring his children home. Jesus' mission is coming to fulfillment; we see God's plan of salvation unfolding before our eyes. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY.

## **SAINTS**

In these last days of the liturgical cycle we focus on the communion of saints—the saints on earth and the saints in heaven that share the eschatological banquet in the Eucharist. We recently celebrated the feast of All Saints and All Souls. It is thus a proper time for us to focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about the SAINTS.

## **LITURGICAL YEAR**

Any Sunday of the year is an appropriate time to reflect on the cycle of the Church year. Every Sunday is a most appropriate time to address what we celebrate in the unfolding liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ from his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit is manifested in one complete liturgical year. As the present Church year is winding down and a new year is soon to begin, it is appropriate that we address what the Church teaches about the LITURGICAL YEAR.

## **KINGDOM OF GOD**

The parables of these past weeks are for the purpose of teaching people what it means to live in the kingdom Jesus came to establish. The reality he proposes transcends the expected norms of their culture and society. It is a new reality—the city of God in which all citizens stand equal before God. Thus, it is most fitting on these last days of the liturgical year that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the KINGDOM OF GOD.

## **EUCCHARIST SERIES:**

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. This week we continue the series on the Mass. Today we will focus on part \_\_\_\_ of the Eucharistic Series.